

8 QUESTIONS

with some very good answers about...

6. Is a bicycle helmet important?

In a word, yes. A good bicycle helmet can save your child from a serious brain injury. Whether your child falls or is hit by a car, a helmet provides the best protection you can buy.

7. How do I get my child to wear one?

+ *Get a helmet your child likes.* There are some great looking ones with a wide assortment of colors available these days. And the prices are pretty good, as well.



Let your child pick out the right one. It makes a difference.

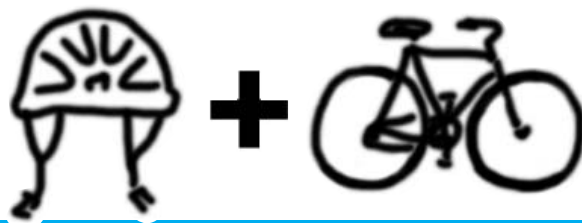
+ *Wear one yourself.* There's really nothing like being a good role model.



+ *Encourage parents of your child's friends to get helmets for themselves and their kids.* This way, your child won't be the only one.



+ *Make a rule: no riding without a helmet.* If you start early, wearing one will come naturally.



8. How do I make sure it fits?

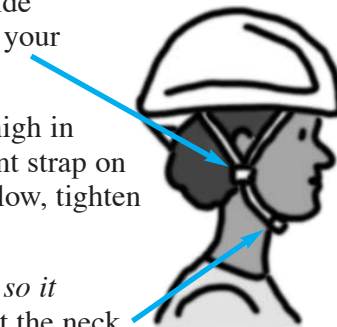
+ *First, get the right one.* Helmets come in toddler, youth and adult sizes S-L. Most kids wear youth or adult medium. Shop where the salespeople know how to fit a helmet!



+ *Use the foam pads to tailor the fit.* Where the helmet is loose, add thicker pads. Where it is tight, use thinner pads.



+ *Make sure the helmet sits level.* Adjust the sliders on each side so they're just under your child's ears.



If the helmet is too high in front, tighten the front strap on each side. If it's too low, tighten the back straps.

+ *Secure the helmet so it stays in place.* Adjust the neck strap. Make it snug but not so tight it chokes your child or is uncomfortable.

+ *Check the snugness of helmet.* Try to push it forward and back and side to side. Adjust the straps if you find any problems. And check the helmet before each ride in case straps have come loose.

Remember: Once a helmet has been crashed, it has done its job. Get a new one! Helmets are designed to save lives by taking the impact and they can only do that one time.



BICYCLE SAFETY and YOUR CHILD

Why should I let my kids bicycle? • How well do young children understand traffic? • How do I teach the basics? • What other skills do kids need? • What can I teach while we ride? • Is a bicycle helmet important? • How do I get my child to wear one? • How do I make sure it fits?

North Carolina Department of Transportation
Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation

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1. Why should I let my kids bicycle?

In short, because bicycling is good for them. While the dangers are real, if done right, bicycling is quite safe. It's good for the heart, lungs, muscles, balance, coordination.

And it's a lifelong activity that folks of all ages enjoy. Teaching your child to bicycle is THE best way to get them off to a good start!

2. How well do young children understand traffic?

In most cases, they don't. And it's for good developmental reasons. Keep these reasons in mind as you teach your young child.

+ *Children can't locate sounds as easily as adults do.* A noisy car can "sneak" up on a child who's looking the wrong way for it.



+ *They can't see things to the side very well.* It takes time for kids to develop "peripheral vision" so they may not notice a car unless they're looking at it.



+ *They can't judge speed and distance well.* A car coming at 35mph may look like it's barely moving.



+ *They live in a self-centered world.* They may believe a driver can see them and will know what they're about to do.



Kids may think cars "stop on a dime" because they can do so on their bikes.



+ *They mix fantasy and reality.* A car's headlights may look like eyes, its grill may look like a nose. Kids may think their bikes go fast like rocket ships or that they are invincible superheroes.

3. How do I teach the basics?

Start your child out on a soft grassy playground with a slight hill. Set the seat low so he or she can put both feet on the ground while seated.

+ *Balancing and steering:* Begin at the top of a little hill. Have your child push off and coast with both feet off the ground while you walk alongside. At first, you'll only go a few feet at a time. With practice, your child will coast all the way.

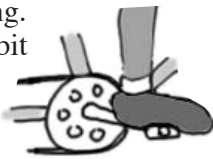


Remember: Balancing and steering are really the same thing. If you start to fall to one side, you balance by steering your bike slightly that way.

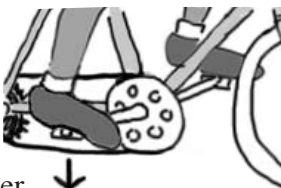
An expert bicyclist makes very small corrections and seems to be going perfectly straight. A new bicyclist makes large corrections and weaves from side to side.



+ *Pedaling:* Once your child can balance and steer, it's time to add pedaling. The idea is to push off, get up a bit of speed, step on the pedals and spin them around. At first, your child may put a foot down after just a few cranks. But it won't take long.



+ *Stopping:* Stopping with coaster brakes means pushing back on the pedal that's behind. If the pedals are at top and bottom, pedal a quarter turn more and brake.



To practice, have your child ride slowly toward you and stop a foot or so away. The first few times, be ready to stop the bike by grabbing the handlebars.



Tip: Handbrakes are for older kids with strong hands!

+ *Turning:* To teach turning, have your child ride toward you. Hold an arm out in the direction you want him or her to go. Your child should lean slightly that way and let the bike follow.

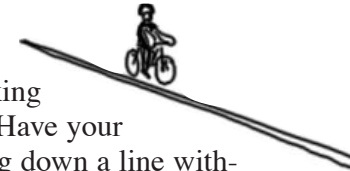


Tip: It helps to look in the direction of the turn.

4. What other skills do kids need?

There are many things to learn but here are a few to teach once your child has mastered the basics.

+ *Riding a straight line.* Try this at home in the driveway or in a quiet nearby parking lot or playground. Have your child practice riding down a line without weaving too far to one side or the other.



It's helpful to look ahead, rather than at the line, and to get up a little speed.

+ *Looking back without weaving.* Bicyclists need to know what's going on around them. Have your child practice riding a straight line, while "scanning" to the rear on your command. As he or she passes you, say "Look!"



Tip: Make eye contact each time to make sure your child looks all the way back.

+ *Riding one-handed.* Things like signalling require taking a hand off the handlebars.

Have your child practice riding straight while holding the bars with first one hand and then the other.



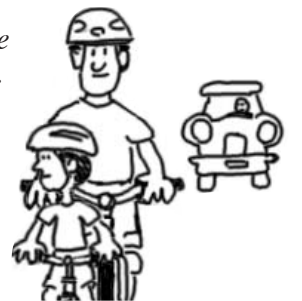
5. What can I teach while we ride?

As you ride with your child, make sure to teach these important skills...

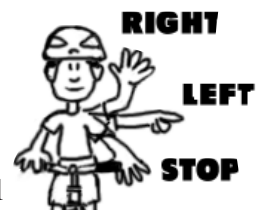
+ *Stop and wait for traffic before riding out of a driveway or alley.* Not doing so is one of the worst bicycling mistakes kids make.



+ *Ride on the right side of the road, with traffic.* Riding against traffic is illegal and puts bicyclists where car drivers don't look. It's a very common cause of crashes!



+ *Use hand signals to communicate with others.* These can tell car drivers, fellow bicyclists, and pedestrians what you want to do. In North Carolina, all hand signals are given with the left hand.



+ *Look back and yield to traffic before you move left to avoid a hazard or make a left turn.* Here's where that "scanning" exercise comes in handy.



+ *Obey traffic signs and signals.* They're meant for bicyclists, too! Does your child know what these signs and signals mean? You can help get the message across!

With practice... these skills will become "second nature" and, eventually, you'll feel confident when your child rides around the neighborhood. But even then, set limits: Today's busy arterial streets are tough places for kids and they should stick to quiet streets.